

Wild Turkey

Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Division of Forestry

Turkey's habitat and food needs change seasonally. Turkey consume a wide variety of nuts, seeds, weeds, fruits and insects.

Habitat should include:

- oak forest (acorns are a staple food for turkey). One third should be of acorn bearing age (25 years, peaking from 40 to 80 years)
- pine stands (roosting, pine nuts and insects). Maintain in an open condition
- grassy or weedy openings (nesting, brooding, bugging), and agricultural fields (10% of the total habitat in openings is sufficient). Native warm-season prairie grasses are especially desirable – they can easily attract one nest per acre.

Prescribed fire is very helpful in managing turkey habitat.

- ♦ Prescribed fire in older pine stands provides the open forest floor turkey like.
- ♦ Light controlled fire in oak forests also benefits turkey but can damage oaks.
- ♦ Native warm season prairie grasses require the use of prescribe fire.

See "Prescribed Fire" and "Native Warm Season Grasses"

Turkeys often nest in clearcuts and fallow fields in which some blackberry and other brush has grown up. Some biologists think that 20-30 acre clearcuts provide better

protection of nests than fields or small openings.

Periodic timber harvests provide temporary nesting/bugging habitat and can also assure a future supply of acorns if oaks are regenerated. Ideally, harvest and regenerate 1% to 1.5% of the forested area per year.

Maintain permanent plots for food, nesting, bugging and brooding by disking, fertilizing with 400-500 lb/ac 6-12-12 (or 200-250 lbs/ac 12-24-24), planting seed-bearing vegetation, and burning 1/3 to 1/5 of the open areas each year on a rotational basis. Disk 15 to 30 foot wide strips, alternating disked and undisked strips every 3 years. Planted foods might include chufas, browntop millet, corn, wheat, crimson and other clovers, grain sorghum, buckwheat, lespedeza and sunflower. Roadsides and power utility line rights-of-way also serve as permanent plots if managed in this way (except for burning where it is inappropriate); mowing in February and August is another option for turkey, quail and deer. Do not mow or disk during nesting season (April - July).

Forested areas should interconnect to provide travel corridors. Leave 50-foot wide strips of hardwoods along all streams.

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